

In typical Bluegrass fashion, neighbors are helping one another as best they can. According to the owner of Parkette Drive-In in Lexington, even as prices for ingredients like chicken have nearly doubled, he has chosen to cut back as much as possible on his end to avoid raising prices for customers.

But as hard as Kentuckians try, Democrats' reckless policies are coming home to roost. As one father of four who lost his job following the devastating Mayfield tornado in December put it, "there's no stretching money at this point."

An outright majority of Americans say inflation is not at all under control. Seven in 10 say our economy is in bad shape, and by all accounts, they know exactly whom to blame for a year of painful challenges.

Sixty-three percent of Americans, nearly two-thirds, say they disapprove of how President Biden is handling the economy, and that number just keeps rising.

But Washington Democrats do not appear to have gotten the message. The Biden administration's new budget proposal leans even further into the policies that got us here in the first place.

Even as President Biden has already presided over soaring prices for gas and home heating fuels, he wants massive new tax hikes on American-made fossil fuels. He wants to skyrocket discretionary domestic spending on a whole catalog of liberal wish-list items, and he wants to compound the pain on our economy by slapping the biggest tax hikes in American history right on top of all of it.

So the past year has taught us how painful Washington Democrats' policies can be for hard-working Americans. The administration needs to stop trying to dig this hole any deeper.

FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. President, now, on another matter, runaway inflation and historic tax hikes aren't the only signs that President Biden's budget was crafted in fantasyland. And, amazingly, yesterday, even as the Biden administration was proposing the biggest tax hikes in American history, that wasn't even the biggest problem of the day.

Most of President Biden's press conference yesterday focused on seemingly major inconsistencies between his public remarks on foreign policy and the actual policy of his administration. A few days ago, President Biden seemed to dramatically change American policy toward Putin's regime during a major international speech before White House staff walked back his comment. Yesterday, the President suggested he was just sharing his personal moral view, not speaking in his policymaking capacity.

We are talking about the Commander in Chief here.

Another time recently, the President seemed to suggest that if Russia violated international law and used chemical weapons in Ukraine, the United States would respond "in kind." Again,

his staff had to quickly explain what the administration actually meant.

The United States does not maintain a chemical weapons stockpile for use. To the contrary, we are working hard to safely dispose of many decades-old munitions.

I know a lot about that. Throughout my career in Washington, I have worked to ensure the stockpile of chemical munitions at the Blue Grass Army Depot in my State are safely but surely disposed of.

But the head-scratching gaffes don't stop there. After spending weeks gratuitously listing all the things America would not do, such as deploy troops into Ukraine, President Biden in Poland seemed to tell American troops they would soon be seeing the bravery of Ukraine's resistance firsthand in person. Again, the White House claimed the President was not actually changing policy.

The troubling inconsistencies go beyond isolated gaffes. The confusion appears to run deeper. For months, White House officials repeatedly insisted the President and his administration were focused on deterring Russian escalation against Ukraine. They repeatedly stressed how the threat of sanctions would serve as a deterrent against further invasion.

But last week, with the world watching, President Biden shockingly claimed he never thought or intended that sanctions would actually deter Putin. This leaves unanswered the question of what he thought they would achieve.

The wild swings between the administration's overly cautious, almost skittish official posture and the President's emotional freelancing is becoming dizzying.

As NATO allies scrambled to help Ukraine fight back, the President refused to authorize a transfer of fighter jets. The administration strangely and unjustifiably felt if we merely facilitated—facilitated—such a transfer, it could be too provocative. But we are supposed to brush it off when the same President seems to actually call for regime change in Russia? Facilitating the transfer of some old fighter jets is too provocative, but remarks like that are just speaking from the heart?

Sadly, mixed messages and confusion have been one of the only consistent threads running through this administration's foreign policy from the very start. The White House chafed against clear warnings from its own military advisers about how quickly Afghanistan could fall after U.S. withdrawal. They stood by the President's assertion that "there's going to be no circumstance where you see people being lifted off the roof of an embassy of the United States," until that exact scene happened in Kabul.

With respect to both the Taliban and Putin, the administration has said repeatedly they think that the fear of becoming international pariahs will actually constrain their actions—as if these regimes cared a lick about global PR.

At the risk of repeating what I and many others have said for years, despots can't be shamed into conforming to polite international society. You can't check lawless violence with finger wagging.

We know what deters aggression: American strength and American clarity. That is what deters aggression.

I have just explained how American clarity has been in too-short supply. But, unfortunately, the Biden administration also seems unwilling to plan and invest in long-term American strength.

Even under the administration's wildly—wildly—optimistic projections about inflation, their budget proposal would only flat-fund our Armed Forces. In the best case scenario, they want American defense to just tread water, nowhere near the robust real growth that bipartisan experts say we need to modernize and keep pace with both Russia and China.

And in the more likely event that Democrats don't magically have inflation plummeting in just a few months, then President Biden's policy would amount to an actual cut—cut—to our defense spending, ramping down American military funding while China ramps theirs up.

China is building for the battlefield of the future. Iran continues funding terrorists and plowing forward with nuclear development. Russian aggression is actively challenging our capacity to keep ourselves and our partners armed.

And the Biden administration sees this as a moment to ease off the gas?

That could not be more mistaken.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Republican whip.

NOMINATION OF KETANJI BROWN JACKSON

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, last week's Judiciary Committee hearing gave Senators the opportunity to hear directly from President Biden's nominee to the Supreme Court, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, to help them decide whether she is an appropriate candidate for the Nation's highest Court.

My approach to deciding whether or not to vote for a Supreme Court nominee or any judicial nominee is pretty simple. I look at the character and qualifications, and most of all, I look at the question of whether the nominee understands the limited role of the judiciary and the separation of powers.

Our Federal Government, of course, has three distinct branches: the legislative branch, which makes the laws; the executive branch—the President and executive Departments—which executes the laws; and the judiciary,